

NEW ORLEANS, LA.

TIMES-PICAYUNE

Approved For Release 2000/06/13 : CIA-RDP75

M - 196,345

S - 308,949

COPYRIGHT

Cuban Blames Stevenson for Bay of Pigs Disaster

Three Survivors Tell of
CPYRGH761 Invasion

By PAUL ATKINSON

"Everyone has his scapegoat. Mine today is Adlai Stevenson. He really weakened President John F. Kennedy when he was all ready."

City International Relations director Alberto Fowler was recalling the harrowing Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, in which he participated with nearly 2,000 other Cubans. They stormed ashore April 17, 1961, and were promptly captured.

Fowler was joined by two other survivors of the ill-starred invasion, Ramiro Montalvo, a McComb, Miss., truck dealer, and Johnny Lopez de la Cruz, home from his second tour of duty in Vietnam with the U.S. Army.

"You have to remember that President Kennedy was a very new President, a very young President. All he needed was the firm conviction of a statesman such as Stevenson, saying if you give air cover to the Cubans, the Russians will go into Berlin."

"That is right," agreed Montalvo.

'HE WEAKENED'

"He weakened," said Fowler of President Kennedy. "Don't forget that Kennedy was talking to an embittered Stevenson who had been put to shame in the eyes of the world when on April 14, 1961, he gave assurances at the United Nations that the United States was not engaging in any protection of the invasion. Two days later he had been used. I can imagine the confrontation between Kennedy and Stevenson must have been ugly."

Fowler, Montalvo and Lopez delaCruz all agree that the lack of air cover was the turning point in the fiasco.

"Basically, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had a good plan," said Montalvo. "I think it was the politics that ruined the plan."

"If it was so good," interjected Fowler, "why right after the Bay of Pigs was Mr. (Mc) Dulles, head of the CIA, and about 600 members of the CIA

fired by President Kennedy?"

"Why was the air support cut off?" parried Montalvo.

"I have to see the reaction of the state, the government," said Fowler. "Everything could not have been very good. . . ."

'HE KNEW TOO MUCH'

"It is my opinion that Dulles was put out because he knew too much," Montalvo said. "He was a witness to the meeting that took place in the White House."

"Everything was set up and ready for a good plan. Cut the island in two, establish a government in a certain piece of the island and we will get the support of the American states."

"So what happened? Everything went down when our boats were sunk by Fidel Castro's air force. All our bombers were gone. We lost the whole deal."

"Why? Because those plans didn't have air support and who called it off? It wasn't the CIA or Dulles. It was Kennedy."

"Way did he do it? Immaturity, weakness. . . he didn't really have to put his hands in the problem. This training camp was started by (President Dwight D.) Eisenhower and (Vice President Richard M.) Nixon."

PLAN CHANGED

Fowler reminded that the original plan during the Eisenhower Administration was for a guerrilla infiltration operation.

"This operational plan was changed after the election," said Fowler. "It was changed to a conventional war. You can't blame the Republican administration for that. Whether Kennedy knew about it, whether they told him or not I don't know. I am sure he had to be informed of it."

Fowler recalls that the landing force of almost 2,000 had complete confidence that they could pull off the invasion and successfully overthrow Castro.

"We had adequate assurances that the operational plan was going through," said Fowler. "And that air cover was part of it. I speak for myself alone, but certainly I had no idea of being

with a calculated risk as in any other war. But it was a complete shock to me and every-

body else that the air cover wasn't there."

GROUP CONFIDENT

Lopez delaCruz said the feeling on the ship was "we are going to win. We were sure we were; there was no doubt in our minds. But we never suspected that our supplies were going to be cut."

Fowler said he first began doubting the wisdom of the invasion on the morning of April 17.

"We were on the beach and had been told that our air force had destroyed all of Castro's planes," explained Fowler. "Our bombers had dropped the last payload of paratroopers."

"We spotted a plane and thinking it was one of ours, many of us rushed out to wave at it. But the plane came down on us, and machine-gunned a number of the men."

"I saw another plane and knew very well something was wrong. We didn't know what. But it set a lot of us thinking out loud that something had gone afoul."

'PICKING BERRIES'

Fowler said that Castro's troops—estimated over the years to be 40,000 to 60,000—soon had encircled the less than 2,000 force of invaders. "It was like picking berries from a field," said Fowler.

Montalvo became philosophical.

"The worst thing that ever happened to me is to lose my country," he began. "This is my second country and I love it like I did Cuba, and I would hate to lose it again. I wouldn't know where to go."

"This is a land of opportunity, but everyday we lose just a little bit more. And I put myself in the group which is not doing anything—which is what happened in Cuba."

PROSPERITY KILLED

"In Cuba the people who thought, backed away from politics. They were too busy with business; they had to create. There was lots of prosperity, but we killed it."

"In a sense we are doing the same thing here. We shy away

from it. Maybe I could do more and

I don't. As a matter of fact, I went to the Bay of Pigs because of an inferiority complex. I am not a fighter. I am afraid of guns."

"I am not a fighter either," said Fowler with a chuckle. "I am a lover."

"I said for the first time I can do something for my country and that is why I joined," explained Montalvo.

'FELT GUILTY'

"We felt guilty," said Fowler. "We felt we had to do something. All of us had a little bit of that feeling, that perhaps we had contributed in one way or other by our apathy and now we had to put up or shut up."

"I don't think I could have ever faced myself if I hadn't done it. I hated everything that happened, but in the end I am a much happier human being because I did it."

"Oh, yes," agreed Montalvo.

OPINION DIVIDED

They were asked if they think there can be another Bay of Pigs invasion-type maneuver?

"I have to answer that with a question, with people like (Sen. J. William) Fulbright running the committees, would there be a chance to train people to invade Cuba?" asked Montalvo. "I think that would be quite impossible."

"I answer by saying yes it is possible," rejoined Fowler. "But 10 years have gone by, and the international situation is completely different."

"Still a military operation against Castro is always possible. A vehicle could be the Organization of American States. This someday could happen; they might jell and decide to do it."

"Where do you get the support?" replied Montalvo.

"Some of the big governments of Latin America have made insinuations that if it were a bona fide operation, they would participate with their armies," explained Fowler.

"To summarize," said Montalvo, "the Cubans would go back to fight and liberate their country."

Some of the Cubans replied, "I don't know if we would like to have the CIA train us again."

Approved For Release 2000/06/13 : CIA-RDP75-00001R00010002006100